

WISDOM

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49

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CONTENTS:

+ Abraham Lincoln *page 1*
By HON. JOSEPH H. CHOATE

AMERICAN ARTISTS

Illustrated Sketch of
Sid M. Brackett

JULIA MARLOWE

In "When Knighthood
Was in Flower"

PEOPLE AND EVENTS OF THE
DAY

SHORT STORIES

AMERICAN BEAUTIES

THE NEEDLE IN ART

POEMS OF THE HEART

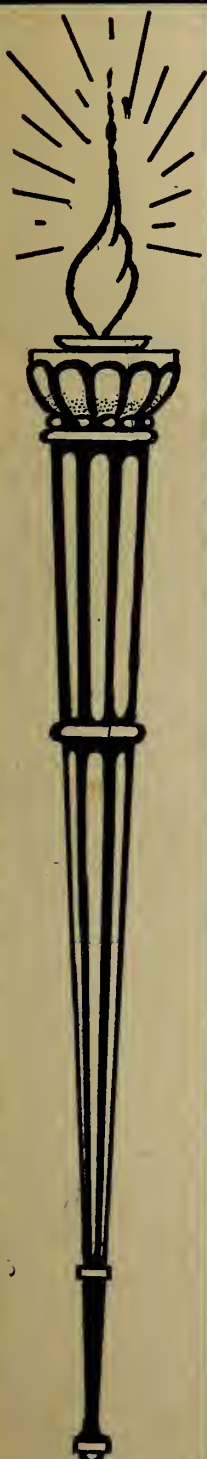
TO OUR READERS

Richly Illustrated

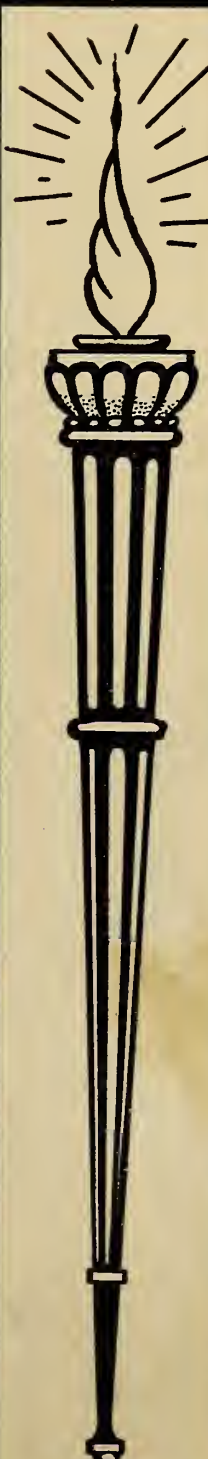
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HON. JOSEPH H. CHOATE

WISDOM

Vol. I.

MARCH, 1902.

No. 1.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By Hon. Joseph H. Choate

A Brief and Comprehensive Sketch of Abraham Lincoln by One of His
Dearest Friends and Greatest Admirers.

During his brief term of power, Abraham Lincoln was probably the object of more abuse, vilification and ridicule than any other man in the world; but when he fell by the hand of an assassin, at the very moment of his stupendous victory, all the nations of the earth vied with one another in paying homage to his character; and the thirty-seven years that have since elapsed have established his place in history as one of the great benefactors, not of his own country alone, but of the human race.

One of many noble utterances upon the occasion of his death was that in which Punch made its magnanimous recantation of the spirit with which it had pursued him:

Beside this corpse that bears for winding sheet

The Stars and Stripes he lived to rear anew,

Between the mourners at his head and feet

Say, scurrile jester, is there room for you?

* * * * *

Yes, he had lived to shame me from my sneer,

To lame my pencil and confute my pen—

To make me own this hind—of Princes peer,

This rail-splitter—a true-born king of men.

Fiction can furnish no match for the romance of his life, and biography will be searched in vain for such startling vicissitudes of fortune, so great power and glory won out of such humble beginnings and adverse circumstances.

Doubtless, you are all familiar with the salient points of his extraordinary career. In the zenith of his fame he was the wise, patient, courageous, successful ruler of men; exercising more power than any monarch of his time, not

for himself, but for the good of the people who had placed it in his hands; Commander-in-Chief of a vast military power, which waged with ultimate success the greatest war of the century; the triumphant champion of popular government, the deliverer of four millions of his fellow-men from bondage; honored by mankind as statesman, President and liberator.

When we review the history of Lincoln's early career and the meagre outfit of this coming leader of men, at the age when the future British Prime Minister or statesman emerges from the university as a double first or senior wrangler, with every advantage that high training and broad culture and association with the wisest and the best of men and women can give, and enters upon some form of public service on the road to usefulness and honor—the university course being only the first stage of the public training—we are astonished.

His power of persuasion, which had always been marked, was developed to an extraordinary degree, now that he became engaged in congenial questions and subjects. Little by little he rose to prominence at the bar, and became the most effective public speaker in the West. Not that he possessed any of the graces of the orator; but his logic was invincible, and his clearness and force of statement impressed upon his hearers the convictions of his honest mind, while his broad sympathies and sparkling and genial humor made him a universal favorite as far and as fast as his acquaintance extended.

My professional brethren will naturally ask me, How could this rough backwoodsman, whose youth had been spent in the forest or on the farm and the flatboat, without culture or training, education or study, by the random reading, on the wing, of a few miscellaneous law books, become a learned and accomplished lawyer? Well, he never did.

He never would have earned his salt as a writer for the *Signet*, nor have won a place as advocate in the Court of Session, where the technique of the profession has reached its highest perfection, and centuries of learning and precedent are involved in the equipment of a lawyer. Dr. Holmes, when asked by an anxious young mother, "When should the education of a child begin?" replied, "Madam, at least two centuries before it is born!" and so I am sure it is with the Scots lawyer.

But not so in Illinois in 1840. Between 1830 and 1880 its population increased twentyfold, and when Lincoln began practicing law in Springfield in 1837 life in Illinois was very crude and simple, and so were the courts and the administration of justice. Books and libraries were scarce. But the people loved justice, upheld the law and followed the courts, and soon found their favorites among the advocates. The fundamental principles of the common law, as set forth by Blackstone and Chitty, were not so difficult to acquire; and brains, common sense, force of character, tenacity of purpose, ready wit and power of speech did the rest, and supplied all the deficiencies of learning.

The lawsuits of those days were extremely simple, and the principles of natural justice were mainly relied on to dispose of them at the bar and on the bench, without resort to technical learning. Railroads, corporations absorbing the chief business of the community; combined and inherited wealth, with all the subtle and intricate questions they breed, had not yet come in—and so the professional agents and the equipment which they require were not needed.

But there were many highly educated and powerful men at the bar of Illinois, even in those early days, whom the spirit of enterprise had carried there in search of fame and fortune. It was by constant contact and conflict with these that Lincoln acquired professional strength and skill. Every community and every age creates its own bar, entirely adequate for its present uses and necessities. So in Illinois, as the population and wealth of the State kept on doubling and quadrupling, its bar presented a growing abundance of learning and science and technical skill. The early practitioners grew with its growth and mastered the requisite knowledge. Chicago soon grew to be one of the largest and richest and certainly the most intensely active city on the continent, and if any one had gone there in Lincoln's later years to try or argue a cause, or transact other business, with

any idea that Edinburgh or London had a monopoly of legal learning, science of subtlety, they would certainly have found their mistake.

In those early days in the West, every lawyer, especially every court lawyer, was necessarily a politician, constantly engaged in the public discussion of the many questions evolved from the rapid development of town, county, State and Federal affairs. Then and there, in this regard, public discussion supplied the place which the universal activity of the press has since monopolized, and the public speaker who, by clearness, force, earnestness and wit, could make himself felt on the questions of the day, would rapidly come to the front. In the absence of that immense variety of popular entertainments which now feed the public taste and appetite, the people found their chief amusement in frequenting the courts and public and political assemblies. In either place, he who impressed, entertained and amused them most was the hero of the hour. They did not discriminate very carefully between the eloquence of the forum and the eloquence of the hustings. Human nature ruled in both alike, and he who was the most effective speaker in a political harangue was often retained as most likely to win in a cause to be tried or argued. And I have no doubt in this way many retainers came to Lincoln. Fees, money in any form, had no charms for him—in his eager pursuit of fame, he could not afford to make money. He was ambitious to distinguish himself by some great service to mankind, and this ambition for fame and real public service left no room for avarice in his composition. However much he earned, he seems to have ended every year hardly richer than he began it, and yet as the years passed fees came to him freely. One of \$5,000 is recorded—a very large professional fee at that time, even in any part of America, the paradise of lawyers.

I lay great stress on Lincoln's career as a lawyer—much more than his biographers do—because in America a state of things exists wholly different from that which prevails in Great Britain. The profession of the law always has been—and is to this day—the principal avenue to public life; and I am sure that his training and experience in the courts had much to do with the development of those forces of intellect and character which he soon displayed on a broader arena.

We are all conversant with the history of Constitutional slavery in the

United States, the efforts of the slave powers to extend the institution over the new territories, the incidents of the Douglas-Lincoln debates of 1858, and the events leading to Lincoln's election for President.

Lincoln foresaw with unerring vision that the conflict was inevitable and irrepressible—that one or the other, the right or the wrong, freedom or slavery, must ultimately prevail, and wholly prevail, throughout the country; and this was the principle that carried the war, once begun, to a finish.

And now, at the age of 51, this child of the wilderness, this farm laborer, rail-splitter, flat-boatman—this surveyor, lawyer, orator, statesman and patriot found himself elected by the great party which was pledged to prevent at all hazards the further extension of slavery, as the Chief Magistrate of the Republic, bound to carry out that purpose, to be the leader and ruler of the nation in its most trying hour.

Those who believe that there is a living Providence that over-rules and conducts the affairs of nations, find in the elevation of this plain man to this extraordinary fortune and to this great duty which he so fitly discharged a signal vindication of their faith.

He was born great, as distinguished from those who achieve greatness or have it thrust upon them, and his inherent capacity, mental, moral and physical, having been recognized by the educated intelligence of a free people, they happily chose him for their ruler in a day of deadly peril.

It is now forty-two years since I first saw and heard Abraham Lincoln, but the impression which he left on my mind is ineffaceable. After his great successes in the West he came to New York to make a political address. He appeared in every sense of the word like one of the plain people among whom he loved to be counted. At first sight there was nothing impressive or imposing about him—except that his great stature singled him out from the crowd; his clothes hung awkwardly on his giant frame, his face was of a dark pallor, without the slightest tinge of color; his seamed and rugged features bore the furrows of hardship and struggle; his deep-set eyes looked sad and anxious; his countenance in repose gave little evidence of that brain power which had raised him from the lowest to the highest station among his countrymen; as he talked to me before the meeting, he seemed ill at ease, with that sort of apprehension which a young man might feel before presenting himself to a new

and strange audience, whose critical disposition he dreaded. It was a great audience, including all the noted men—all the learned and cultured—of his party in New York; editors, clergymen, statesmen, lawyers, merchants, critics. They were all very curious to hear him. His fame as a powerful speaker had preceded him, and exaggerated rumor of his wit—the worst forerunner of an orator—had reached the East. When Mr. Bryant presented him, on the high platform of the Cooper Institute, a vast sea of eager upturned faces greeted him, full of intense curiosity to see what this rude child of the people was like. He was equal to the occasion. When he spoke he was transformed; his eye kindled, his voice rang, his face shone and seemed to light up the whole assembly. For an hour and a half he held his audience in the hollow of his hand. His style of speech and manner of delivery were severely simple. What Lowell called “the grand simplicities of the Bible,” with which he was so familiar, were reflected in his discourse. With no attempt at ornament or rhetoric, without parade or pretence, he spoke straight to the point. If any came expecting the turgid eloquence or the ribaldry of the frontier, they must have been startled at the earnest and sincere purity of his utterances. It was marvellous to see how this untutored man, by mere self-discipline and the chastening of his own spirit, had outgrown all meretricious arts, and found his own way to the grandeur and strength of absolute simplicity.

He spoke upon the theme which he had mastered so thoroughly. He demonstrated by copious historical proofs and masterly logic that the fathers who created the Constitution in order to form a more perfect union, to establish justice and to secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity, intended to empower the Federal Government to exclude slavery from the territories. In the kindest spirit, he protested against the avowed threat of the Southern States to destroy the Union if, in order to secure freedom in those vast regions, out of which future States were to be carved, a Republican President were elected. He closed with an appeal to his audience, spoken with all the fire of his aroused and kindling conscience, with a full outpouring of his love of justice and liberty, to maintain their political purpose on that lofty and unassailable issue of right and wrong which alone could justify it, and not to be intimidated from their high resolve and sacred duty by any threats

of destruction to the Government or of ruin to themselves. He concluded with this telling sentence, which drove the whole argument home to all our hearts: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." That night the great hall, and the next day the whole city, rang with delighted applause and congratulations, and he who had come as a stranger departed with the laurels of a great triumph.

Alas! In five years from that exulting night, I saw him again, for the last time, in the same city, borne in his coffin through its draped streets. With tears and lamentations a heart-broken people accompanied him from Washington, the scene of his martyrdom, to his last resting place in the young city of the West, where he had worked his way to fame.

We all know the gigantic proportions of the Civil War; that it lasted four years instead of three months; that in its progress instead of 75,000 men, more than 2,000,000 were enrolled on the side of the Government alone; that the aggregate cost and loss to the nation approximated to \$5,000,000,000, and that not less than 300,000 brave and precious lives were sacrificed on each side. History has recorded how Lincoln bore himself during these four frightful years; that he was the real President, the responsible and actual head of the Government through it all; that he listened to all advice, heard all parties, and then, always realizing his responsibility to God and the nation, decided every great executive question for himself. His absolute honesty had become proverbial long before he was President. "Honest Abe Lincoln" was the name by which he had been known for years. His every act attested it.

In all the grandeur of the vast power that he wielded, he never ceased to be one of the plain people, as he always called them, never lost or impaired his perfect sympathy with them, was always in perfect touch with them and open to their appeals; and here lay one very secret of his personality and of his power, for the people in turn gave him their absolute confidence. His courage, his fortitude, his patience, his hopefulness, were sorely tried, but never exhausted.

He was true as steel to his Generals, but had frequent occasion to change them, as he found them inadequate. This serious and painful duty rested wholly on him, and was perhaps his most important function as Command-

er-in-Chief; but when, at last, he recognized in Gen. Grant the master of the situation, the man who could and would bring the war to a triumphant end, he gave it all over to him, and upheld him with all his might. Amid all the pressure and distress that the burdens of office brought upon him, his unfailing sense of humor saved him—probably it made it possible for him to live under the burden. He had always been the great story teller of the West, and he used and cultivated this faculty to relieve the weight of the load he bore.

It enabled him to keep the wonderful record of never having lost his temper, no matter what agony he had to bear. A whole night might be spent in recounting the stories of his wit, humor and harmless sarcasm. But I will recall only two of his sayings, both about Gen. Grant, who always found plenty of enemies and critics to urge the President to oust him from his command. One, I am sure, will interest all Scotchmen. They repeated with malicious intent the gossip that Grant drank. "What does he drink?" asked Lincoln. "Whiskey" was, of course, the answer; doubtless you can guess the brand. "Well," said the President, "just find out what particular kind he uses and I'll send a barrel to each of my other Generals." The other must be as pleasing to the British as to the American ear. When pressed again on other grounds to get rid of Grant, he declared, "I can't spare that man; he fights!"

He was tender hearted to a fault, and never could resist the appeals of wives and mothers of soldiers who had got into trouble and were under sentence of death for their offences. His Secretary of War and other officials complained that they never could get deserters shot. As surely as the women of the culprit's family could get at him, he always gave way. Certainly you will all appreciate his exquisite sympathy with the suffering relatives of those who had fallen in battle. His heart bled with theirs. Never was there a more gentle and tender utterance than his letter to a mother who had given all her sons to her country, written at a time when the angel of death had visited almost every household in the land, and was already hovering over him:

"I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from your grief for a loss so overwhelming—but I cannot refrain

from tendering to you the consolation which may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and the lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

The Emancipation Proclamation, with which Mr. Lincoln delighted the country and the world on the 1st of January, 1863, will doubtless secure for him a foremost place in history among the philanthropists and benefactors of the race, as it rescued from hopeless and degrading slavery so many millions of his fellow beings described in the law and existing in fact as "chattels personal, in the hands of their owners and possessors, to all intents, constructions and purposes whatsoever." Rarely does the happy fortune come to one man to render such a service to his kind—to proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.

Ideas rule the world, and never was there a more signal instance of this triumph of an idea than here. William Lloyd Garrison, who thirty years before had begun his crusade for the abolition of slavery, and had lived to see this glorious and unexpected consummation of the hopeless cause to which he had devoted his life, well described the Proclamation as a "great historic event, sublime in its magnitude, momentous and beneficent in its far-reaching consequences, and eminently just and right alike to the oppressor and the oppressed."

Lincoln had been always heart and soul opposed to slavery. By the mere election of Lincoln to the Presidency, the further extension of slavery into the Territories was rendered forever impossible—*Vox populi vox Dei*. Revolutions never go backward, and when founded on a great moral sentiment stirring the heart of an indignant people, their edicts are irresistible and final. Had the slave power acquiesced in that election, had the Southern States remained under the Constitution and within the Union, and relied upon their Constitutional and legal rights, their favorite institution, immoral as it was, blighting and fatal as it was, might have endured for another century. The great party that had elected him, unalterably determined against its extension, was nevertheless pledged not to interfere with its continuance in the States where it already existed. Of course, when new regions were forever closed against

it, from its very nature it must have begun to shrink and to dwindle; and probably gradual and compensated emancipation, which appealed very strongly to the new President's sense of justice and expediency, would, in the progress of time, be a reversion to the ideas of the founders of the Republic, have found a safe outlet for both masters and slaves. But "whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad," and when seven States, afterward increased to eleven, openly seceded from the Union, when they declared and began the war upon the nation, and challenged its mighty power to the desperate and protracted struggle for its life, and for the maintenance of its authority as a nation over its territory, they gave to Lincoln and to freedom the sublime opportunity of history.

In his first inaugural address, when as yet not a drop of precious blood had been shed, while he held out to them the olive branch in one hand, in the other he presented the guarantees of the Constitution, and after reciting the emphatic resolution of the convention that nominated him, that the maintenance inviolate of the "rights of the States, and, especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend," he reiterated this sentiment and declared with no mental reservation, "that all the protection which, consistently with the Constitution and the laws, can be given, will be cheerfully given to all the States when lawfully demanded for whatever cause—as cheerfully to one section as to another."

When, however, these magnanimous overtures for peace and reunion were rejected; when the seceding States defied the Constitution and every clause and principle of it; when they persisted in staying out of the Union from which they had seceded, and proceeded to carve out of its territory a new and hostile empire based on slavery; when they flew at the throat of the nation and plunged it into the bloodiest war of the nineteenth century—the tables were turned, and the belief gradually came to the mind of the President that if the rebellion was not soon subdued by force of arms, if the war must be fought out to the bitter end, then to reach that end the salvation of the nation itself might require the destruction of slavery wherever it existed; that if the war was to continue on one side for disunion, for no other purpose than to preserve slav-

ery, it must continue on the other side for the Union, to destroy slavery.

As he said, "Events control me; I cannot control events," and as the dreadful war progressed, and became more deadly and dangerous, the unalterable conviction was forced upon him that, in order that the frightful sacrifice of life and treasure on both sides might not be all in vain, it had become his duty as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, as a necessary war measure, to strike a blow at the rebellion which, all others failing, would inevitably lead to its annihilation, by annihilating the very thing for which it was contending.

And so, at last, when in his judgment the indispensable necessity had come, he struck the fatal blow, and signed the Proclamation which has made his name immortal. By it, the President, as Commander-in-Chief in time of actual armed rebellion, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing the rebellion, proclaimed all persons held as slaves in the States and parts of States then in rebellion to be thenceforward free, and declared that the Executive, with the army and navy, would recognize and maintain their freedom.

In the other great steps of the Government which led to the triumphant prosecution of the war, he necessarily shared the responsibility and the credit with the great statesmen who stayed up his hands in his Cabinet—with Seward, Chase and Stanton and the rest, and with his Generals and Admirals, his soldiers and sailors—but this great act was absolutely his own. The conception and execution were exclusively his. He laid it before his Cabinet as a measure on which his mind was made up and could not be changed, asking them only for suggestions as to details. He chose the time and the circumstances under which the emancipation should be proclaimed and when it should take effect.

It came not an hour too soon; but public opinion in the North would not have sustained it earlier. In the first eighteen months of the war its ravages had extended from the Atlantic to beyond the Mississippi. Many victories in the West had been balanced and paralyzed by inaction and disasters in Virginia, only partially redeemed by the bloody and indecisive battle of Antietam; a reaction had set in from the general enthusiasm which had swept the Northern States after the assault upon Sumter. It could not truly be said that they had lost heart, but faction was raising its head. Heard through the land like the blast of a bugle, the Proclamation rallied the patriotism of the

country to fresh sacrifices and renewed ardor. It was a step that could not be revoked. It relieved the conscience of the nation from an incubus that had oppressed it from its birth. The United States were rescued from the false predicament in which they had been from the beginning, and the great popular heart leaped with new enthusiasm for "Liberty and Union, henceforth and forever, one and inseparable." It brought not only moral but material support to the cause of the Government, for within two years 120,000 colored troops were enlisted in the military service, and following the national flag, supported by all the loyalty of the North, and led by its choicest spirits. One mother said, when her son was offered the command of the first colored regiment, "If he accepts it I shall be as proud as if I had heard that he was shot." He was shot heading a gallant charge of his regiment. The Confederates replied to a request of his friends for his body that they "had buried him under a layer of his niggers;" but that mother has lived to enjoy thirty-six years of his glory, and Boston has erected its noblest monument to his memory.

The effect of the Proclamation upon the actual progress of the war was not immediate, but wherever the Federal armies advanced they carried freedom with them, and when the summer came round the new spirit and force which had animated the heart of the Government and people were manifest. In the first week of July, the decisive Battle of Gettysburg turned the tide of war, and the fall of Vicksburg made the great river free from its source to the Gulf.

On foreign nations the influence of the Proclamation and of these new victories was of great importance. In those days, when there was no cable, it was not easy for foreign observers to appreciate what was really going on; they could not see clearly the true state of affairs, as in the last year of the nineteenth century we have been able, by our new electric vision, to watch every event at the antipodes and observe its effect. The rebel emissaries, sent over to solicit intervention, spared no pains to impress upon the minds of public and private men and upon the press their own views of the character of the contest. The prospects of the Confederacy were always better abroad than at home. The stock markets of the world gambled upon its chances, and its bonds at one time were in high favor.

Such ideas as these were seriously held: that the North was fighting for

empire, and the South for independence; that the Southern States, instead of being the grossest oligarchies, essentially despotisms, founded on the right of one man to appropriate the fruit of other men's toil and to exclude them from equal rights, were real republics, feebler to be sure than their Northern rivals, but representing the same idea of freedom, and that the mighty strength of the nation was being put forth to crush them; that Jefferson Davis and the Southern leaders had created a nation; that the republican experiment had failed, and the Union had ceased to exist. But the crowning argument to foreign minds was that it was an utter impossibility for the Government to win in the contest; that the success of the Southern States, so far as separation was concerned, was as certain as any event yet future and contingent could be; that the subjugation of the South by the North, even if it could be accomplished, would prove a calamity to the United States and the world, and especially calamitous to the negro race; and that such a victory would necessarily leave the people of the South for many generations cherishing deadly hostility against the Government and the North, and plotting always to recover their independence.

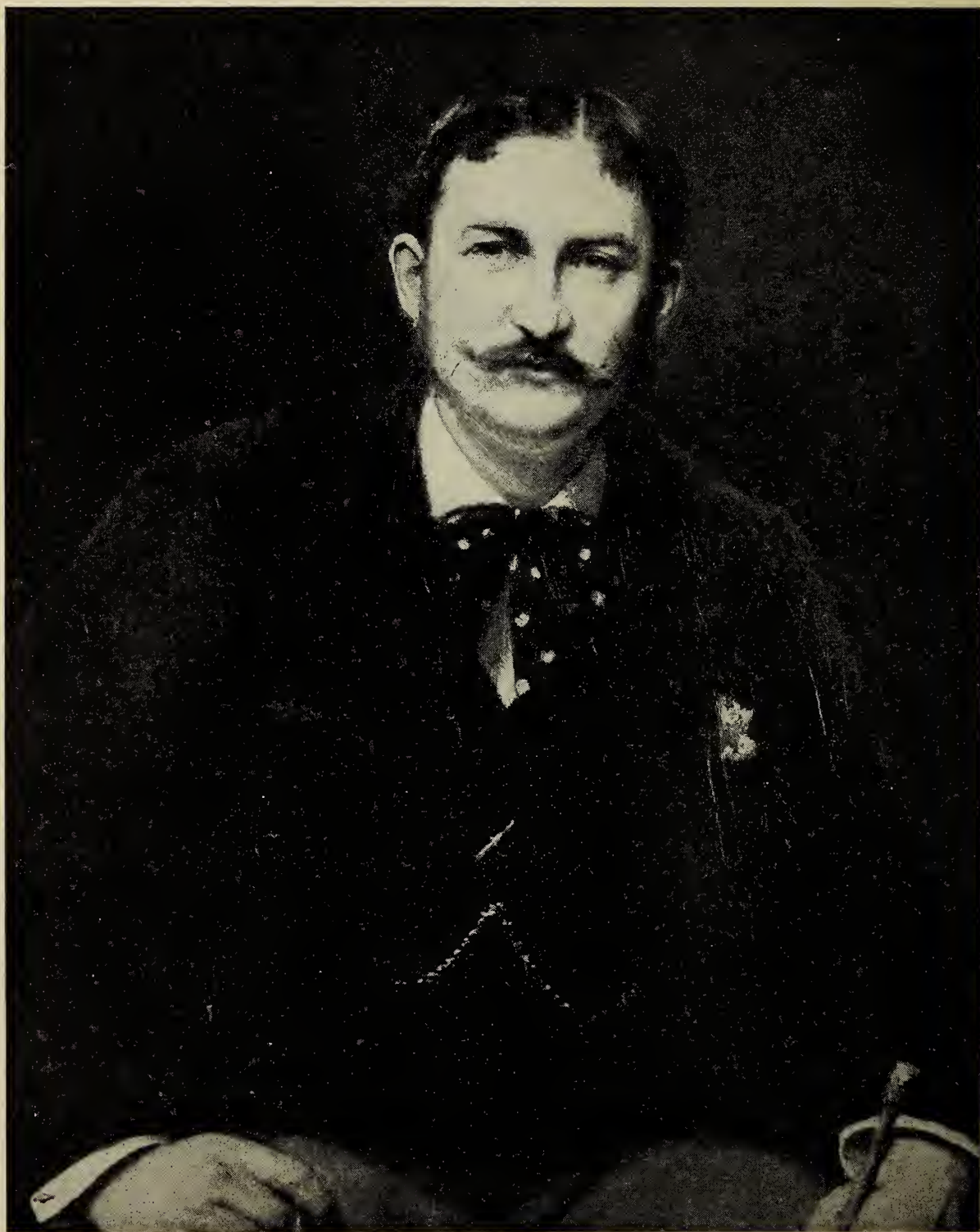
When Lincoln issued his Proclamation he knew that all these ideals were founded in error; that the national resources were inexhaustible; that the Government could and would win, and that if slavery were once finally disposed of, the only cause of difference being out of the way, the North and South would come together again and, by-and-by, be as good friends as ever. In many quarters abroad the Proclamation was welcomed with enthusiasm by the friends of America; but I think the demonstrations in its favor that brought more gladness to Lincoln's heart than any other were the meetings held in the manufacturing centres by the very operatives upon whom the war bore the hardest, expressing the most enthusiastic sympathy with the Proclamation, while they bore with heroic fortitude the grievous privations which the war entailed upon them. Mr. Lincoln's expectation when he announced to the world that all slaves in all States then in rebellion were set free, must have been that the avowed position of his Government, that the continuance of the war now meant the annihilation of slavery, would make intervention impossible for any foreign nation whose people were lovers of liberty—and so the result proved.

The growth and development of Lincoln's mental power and moral force, of his intense and magnetic personality, after the vast responsibilities of Government were thrown upon him at the age of 52, furnish a rare and striking illustration of the marvellous capacity and adaptability of the human intellect—of the sound mind in the sound body. He came to the discharge of the great duties of the Presidency with absolutely no experience in the administration of Government, or of the vastly varied and complicated questions of foreign and domestic policy which immediately arose and continued to press upon him during the rest of his life; but he mastered each as it came, apparently with the facility of a trained and experienced ruler. As Clarendon said of Cromwell—"His parts seemed to be raised by the demands of great station." His life through it all was one of intense labor, anxiety and distress, without one hour of peaceful repose from first to last. But he rose to every occasion. He led public opinion, but did not march so far in advance of it as to fail of its effective support in every great emergency. He knew the heart and thought of the people, as no man not in constant and absolute sympathy with them could have known it, and so, holding their confidence, he triumphed through and with them. Not only was there this steady growth of intellect, but the infinite delicacy of his nature and its capacity for refinement developed also, as exhibited in the purity and perfection of his language and style of speech. The rough backwoodsman, who had never seen the inside of a university, became in the end, by self-training and the exercise of his own powers of mind, heart and soul, a master of style—and some of his utterances will rank with the best, the most perfectly adapted to the occasion which produced them.

His prayer was answered. He lived to see his Proclamation of Emancipation embodied in an amendment of the Constitution, adopted by Congress and submitted to the States for ratification. The mighty scourge of war did speedily pass away, for it was given him to witness the surrender of the Rebel army and the fall of their capital, and the starry flag that he loved waving in triumph over the national soil. When he died by the madman's hand in the supreme hour of victory, the vanquished lost their best friend, and the human race one of its noblest examples; and all the friends of freedom and justice, in whose cause he lived and died, joined hands as mourners at his grave.

AMERICAN ARTISTS

An Illustrated Sketch of Sid L. Brackett, the Famous Cat Artist. Mr. Brackett is one of the Most Successful and Popular Artists in Boston.



SID L. BRACKETT